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CISESS, Peel District School Board

***"What is solid evidence of understanding (or not understanding)? Are we truly assessing understanding and transfer, or simply assessing what is easiest to test and grade?"* –Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe**

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# Policy

Assessment plays a critical role in teaching and learning and should have as its goal the development of students as independent and autonomous learners. The use of assessment for the purpose of improving learning and helping students become independent learners requires a culture in which student and teacher learn together in a collaborative relationship, each playing an active role in setting learning goals, developing success criteria, giving and receiving feedback, monitoring progress, and adjusting learning strategies. The teacher acts as a “lead learner”, providing support while gradually releasing more and more responsibility to the student, as the student develops the knowledge and skills needed to become an independent learner.

**What is product evidence?**

Evidence of learning refers to anything that **students do**, **say** or **create** that demonstrates understanding of Ontario curriculum expectations. Evidence of learning also refers to a more holistic approach or process of appraising what students know, can do and understand in place traditional assessment methods of teaching, quizzing and testing. It uses the process of **triangulation** of student data used in research to provide a more well-rounded and all-inclusive picture of student achievement. Triangulation means collecting student evidence over time from three sources: observations, conversations and **student products** and considering all three sources in determining students’ grades. Each teacher needs to determine the amount of evidence that will be needed given what students are learning. Not all evidence gathered or sampled needs be used in determining students’ grades. Simply triangulating the evidence will not guarantee you have reliable ‘proof’ of student learning. What really matters is the quality of the evidence of learning gathered from students and involving students as much as possible throughout the assessment process.

# Context

Teachers will obtain assessment information through a variety of means, which may include formal and informal observations, discussions, learning conversations, questioning, conferences, homework, tasks done in groups, demonstrations, projects, portfolios, developmental continua, performances, peer and self-assessments, self-reflections, essays, and tests. Evidence of student achievement for evaluation (i.e. assessment of learning) is collected over time from three different sources –*observations*, *conversations*, and ***student products***. Using multiple sources of evidence increases the reliability and validity of the evaluation of student learning**. “Student products” may be in the form of tests or exams and/or assignments for evaluation. Assignments for evaluation may include rich performance tasks,** **demonstrations, projects, and/or essays**.

Peel’s *Growing Success* Monograph Series:

Evidence of Learning: Student Products

Grades 1-12

**teacher moderation.** A process for ensuring that the assessment of student learning and the results of assessment and evaluation are comparable across classes and/or schools. In teacher moderation, teachers examine student work together to share beliefs and practices, enhance their understanding, compare their interpretations of student results, and confirm their judgements about a student’s level of achievement. Teachers might also look at the assignment that was given and analyse its effectiveness in relation to the learning achieved by the students.

**student-led conference.** A student-parent conference that engages the student in direct communication with the parents through the use of portfolios illustrating the student’s achievement and learning. Students take the lead in walking their parents through a selection of accomplishments and demonstrations of their work. Student-led conferences bring students to the centre of classroom assessment.

**portfolio.** A collection of samples of student work that the student, with teacher support, carefully selects and adds to on an ongoing basis to track what the student has learned throughout the year. Both teachers and students assess the work in portfolios. Because students are asked to actively reflect on their learning in order to choose the samples that will go into the portfolio, a portfolio is an especially powerful self-assessment tool.

**assignment for evaluation.** An assignment for evaluation is used to evaluate student learning. Most assignments for evaluation are rich performance tasks, demonstrations, projects, or essays. Assignments for evaluation do *not* include ongoing homework that students do to practise skills, consolidate knowledge and skills, and/or prepare for the next class.

**How Does Product Evidence Align to *Growing Success* Policy?**

**(Assessment Framework: Processes and Strategies in a Collaborative Relationship for Teachers, Peers, and Individual Learners)**

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**Gathering Evidence from Student Products**

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| **Criteria for Designing Quality ‘Student Products’**  **(including performances and representations)** | **Next Steps** |
| **1. The product addresses key curriculum learning expectations within the subject/course:**   * allows the student to demonstrate deep understanding of the Overall curriculum expectations and related Specific expectations * measures what is valued and not simply what is easy to test and grade * allows students to respond to important questions about what is at the heart of the subject/discipline (big ideas/enduring understandings) * allows students to make new connections in their learning, whenever appropriate * addresses established unit learning goals and success criteria * evaluates transferable knowledge, skills and habits of mind |  |
| **2. The product addresses the Achievement Chart:**   * addresses most if not all of the categories in a balanced way * accurately reflects or represents the spirit/purpose of the categories * assessment tools (rubrics, checklists) clearly describe what success looks like in each level of performance in language that students can/will understand |  |
| **3. The product encourages student engagement and inquiry into the subject:**   * provides opportunity(ies) for the student to inquire, carry out investigations, solve problems, explore, use reasoned judgment, investigate. and use the concepts & thinking from the subject/discipline in meaningful ways * requires the application of thinking skills/processes (rather than merely recalling factual information and/or restating and replicating what was taught) * challenges the student by requiring the student to use higher level thinking skills (e.g., analysis, synthesis, evaluation, critical thinking, critical literacy, multi-literacies) * allows the student to apply knowledge in a global way (holistic) as opposed to measuring isolated skills |  |
| **4. The product results from a number of formative opportunities to rehearse, practise, consult resources, and get descriptive feedback on where and how to improve:**   * product development is supported by robust assessment *for l*earning processes * provides opportunities for rich development of learning skills and work habits * provides opportunities for the student to focus on their learning through the teaching-learning-assessment cycle and supports assessment as learning (meta-cognition) * prepares the student properly to produce high quality representations, performances, demonstrations or products (use of samples, co-constructed success criteria etc.) |  |
| **5. The product can take different forms for the student to demonstrate learning:**   * allows the student to demonstrate learning through various means associated with ‘student products’ – a bounded range of choices/options reflecting student input. * measures what it purports to measure (not a ‘fun but aimless activity’) |  |
| **6. Products provide a level of differentiation for different learner profiles:**   * removes any barriers or obstacles that might prevent a student from being able to adequately demonstrate what he/she knows or can do * product options are culturally responsive and involve student voice/input * can be modified/enriched/extended for students in equitable ways |  |
| **7. Products invite student demonstration and development of 21st century skills:**   * sound design that invites students to think critically and creatively and use literacy, critical literacy, digital literacy, numeracy skills and other crucial skills & habits of mind important for 21st century learning. |  |

Adapted from: *Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting Handbook: A Guide for Secondary School Teachers and Administrators.* Peel District School Board, 2005.

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| **8 Important Criteria for Designing Secondary Final Evaluations (Final 30% Components)** | **Met** | **Not Yet Met** |
| **Planned** – final evaluation has been designed and created prior to the beginning of the course, whenever possible. It reflects core course priorities. The evaluation represents strong commitment to principles of backwards design. |  |  |
| **Relevant** – final evaluation components address the big ideas derived from the overall curriculum expectations; it also invites student reflection. |  |  |
| **Balanced** – final evaluation has all four achievement chart categories |  |  |
| **Aligned** – weight for each category is proportionate to weight in the 70%. |  |  |
| **Consistent** – final evaluation is consistent with the assessment experiences students have had during the course. |  |  |
| **Transparent** – students know what the final evaluation consists of and have access to a published document which appears in a common school format for all departments. The assessment tool for final evaluation components are included and available for students well before the final evaluation and is consistent with assessment tools that have been used during the semester. |  |  |
| **Varied** – the final evaluation has more than one component including evidence of learning in the form of observation, conversation and student products. |  |  |
| **Engaging** – final evaluation components appeal to one or more of the 8 C’s of engagement (**competition**, **challenge**, **curiosity**, **controversy**, **choice**, **creativity**, **cooperation**, **connections**) in its design for students. |  |  |
| **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(Optional Additional Criterion) –** |  |  |
| **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(Optional Additional Criterion) –** |  |  |
| **Next Steps:** | | |

**rich performance task.** An authentic activity, exercise, problem, or challenge that requires students to show what they know and what they can do. Performance tasks lead students to demonstrate their understanding by applying knowledge and skills to real-life situations or scenarios. Performance tasks usually address all four categories of the achievement chart and multiple overall curriculum expectations and provide flexibility in how students can demonstrate their learning.

**scaffolding.** An instructional approach that involves breaking down tasks so that students can concentrate on specific, manageable objectives and gradually build understanding and skill, with the aid of modelling by the teacher and ample opportunity for practice. Scaffolding provides students with a supportive structure within which to learn.

**What is a Critical Challenge? (The Critical Thinking Consortium-TC2)**

**Infusing critical challenges throughout the curriculum**

If students are to improve their ability to think critically, **they must have numerous opportunities to engage and think through problematic situations**—what we refer to as ***critical challenge****s*.

• ***Does the question or task require judgment?***A question or task is a critical challenge only if it invites students to assess the reasonableness of plausible options or alternative conclusions. In short, it must require more than retrieval of information, rote application of a strategy, uninformed guessing or mere assertion of a preference.

• ***Will the challenge [or task] be meaningful to students?***Trivial, de-contextualized mental exercises often alienate or bore students. It is important to frame challenges that are likely to engage students in tackling questions and tasks that they will find meaningful.

• ***Does the challenge [or task] address key aspects of the subject matter?***Critical thinking should not be divorced from the rest of the curriculum. Students are more likely to learn the content of the curriculum if they are invited to think critically about issues embedded in the subject matter.

• ***Do students have the tools or can they reasonably acquire the tools needed to competently address the challenge [or task]?***Students need support in acquiring the essentialtools required to competently meet the critical challenge.

**The Six Types of Critical Challenges:**

* + **Critique the piece** (re-evaluate a work in light of new criteria)
  + **Judge the better or best** (judge the overall best option in light of criteria from a range of options)
  + **Rework the piece** (redesign something according to new instructions or criteria)
  + **Decode the puzzle** (unravel an enigmatic or problematic situation; provide a criteria-based solution)
  + **Design to specs** (design a product according to given specifications)
  + **Perform to specs** (give a performance according to given specifications)

**Something to Think About…**

1. To what extent do the student products that we are currently collecting provide us with rich evidence of learning of the Overall curriculum expectations and big ideas in the grade/course? If not, why not? What might need to change?
2. How might we tweak, fortify or modify our current student products to become more like ‘critical challenges’ that invite students to think critically and creatively and use reasoned judgement?
3. How might we involve students and student voice more in the design and choice of available student products for evaluation? How might we differentiate to engage students?
4. How might different digital and other technologies be used to support students in the learning process to create higher quality student products? What samples might we use?

**Additional Resources:**

* Growing Success 2010: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario Schools, Covering Grades 1-12
* *Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting Handbook: A Guide for Secondary School Teachers and Administrators.* Peel District School Board, 2005.
* Introduction to the TC2 Conception of Critical Thinking By Roland Case and LeRoi Daniels
* Making Classroom Assessment Work, 2nd Edition, Anne Davies, Connections Publishing, 2007.
* The Critical Thinking Consortium, TC2, [www.tc2.ca](http://www.tc2.ca)